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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: GOR ON GEORGIAN JOURNALISTS DETAINED IN ABKHAZIA
REF: MOSCOW 566

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) In a March 3 conversation, GOR Special Envoy to the Abkhazia conflict Vladislav Chernov took on board our request that Russia communicate to the Abkhaz leadership the need for restraint and speedy release of the Georgian journalists detained in Abkhazia, and welcomed U.S. efforts to lower Saakashvili's rhetoric. He told us that through working-level contacts, the GOR received a promise from the Abkhaz that the journalists would be released within a few days. MFA Fourth CIS Department Deputy Director Dmitriy Tarabrin repeated that, although the GOR does not dictate what Abkhaz "president" Bagapsh does, he was confident that the journalists would be freed "in the near future."

¶2. (C) However, both Chernov and Tarabrin stressed that tensions had escalated because of Saakashvili's actions. Chernov blamed Saakashvili for his "provocative" warning that either the Abkhazian authorities release the journalists immediately or he would, which caused the unnecessary worsening of the situation. Chernov speculated that Saakashvili's behavior was motivated by the prospect of the May Parliament elections in Georgia, including the Gali region. He added that Saakashvili's "inflammable words" alone led to Abkhazia's mobilization of its own security forces along the "border," he added. Tarabrin emphasized that in the aftermath of the Kosovo UDI, both sides needed to be particularly cautious.

¶3. (C) Chernov, recalling Putin's words during the February 21 Putin - Saakashvili bilateral that all would depend on the Georgian side (ref), underscored that Saakashvili should refrain from engaging in "small" provocations. According to him, the Mze T.V. team was planning a politically sensitive program, involving an Abkhazia-born TV journalist and his aging mother -- portrayed as an IDP returning to her home. Chernov advised that such a project could only aggravate the already tense feeling between the two partners in conflict.
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